

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

NOVEMBER 2008

FOUR DOLLARS







Bob Duncan

Executive Director



**N**ovember ushers in days of beauty and bounty for people who love the outdoors. It is also a busy month for our agency. As hunting and wildlife-related activities pick up, our employees shift into high gear to respond to phone calls, to educate, and to address public safety concerns. Conservation police officers help patrol fields and woodlands and maintain close contact with hunters across Virginia. And we are sometimes called upon to assist beyond state borders—during natural disasters, when large-scale rescue by boat is required.

And, that's the way it should be. Our law enforcement team is well schooled in outdoor situations and dangers, and they stand ready to help. While we are reimbursed for such out-of-state efforts, it does beg a question about resources and how to provide more services while stretching our staff and overall operational budget. I imagine you are feeling the pinch as well.

It is tempting to point fingers when economic times are tough. It is much more difficult to look inward,

to consider what history might teach us. There have been some interesting commentaries lately about the contributions hunters make

to society. One in the *Washington Post* recently (9/14/08) reminded the reader that hunters just might have written the original script for "being green." The author, Steve Sanetti, extols the fact that eating locally harvested meat reduces our carbon footprint. He also notes the high nutritional and low-fat content of wild game. Mr. Sanetti goes on to say that hunters are wise and generous when it comes to stewarding the natural world.

I would agree. I would add that during times of economic upheaval Americans have done well to "return to the land." History reveals that being connected to nature—through the local bounty of fish, game, and wild plants—has sustained many a family. Virginia hunters and anglers and naturalists know this well. Hunters, especially, have a reputation for sharing the fruits of their labor with others in need. This Thanksgiving, perhaps more than any other, I am grateful to be standing among their ranks.

### Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; To provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; To promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; To provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing and boating opportunities.

*Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources*

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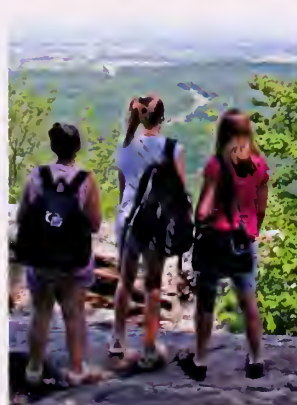
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Both the drake and the hen wood duck (*Aix sponsa*) are beautiful in their own right. Wood ducks belong to the family of puddle ducks, native to the eastern woods and freshwater swamps of the United States.

©Spike Knuth



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# The Hunt is More Than

*For one duck hunter, success is not measured by the number of birds in the bag.*

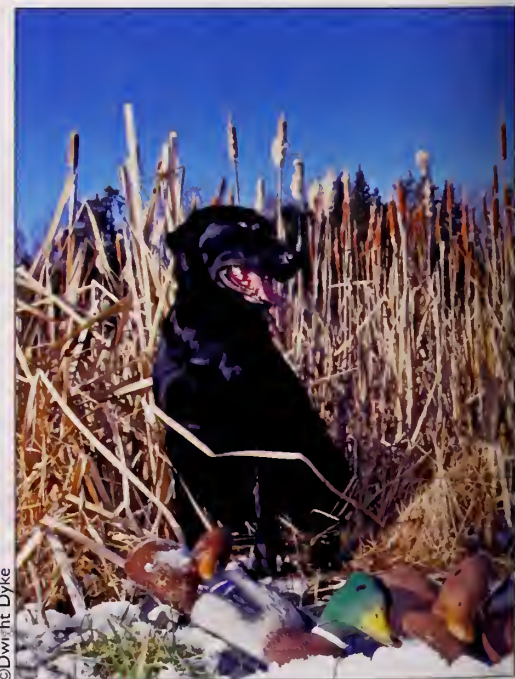
by Randall Shank

**A**s I waited in the blind, I saw an approaching wall of clouds on the horizon. The front rolled in with a terrific wind but no rain. It was as if someone had opened a floodgate somewhere upriver, but instead of water being released, there was a flood of ducks. Mallards, teal and bluebills flew

downriver with the wind at their backs. Seeing our decoys, they cupped their wings looking for company and a place to land out of the wind. The ducks veered past the decoys and came back flying into the gale to attempt a landing in front of our blind. They didn't hesitate. All caution for them was literally thrown to the wind.

The spectacle of it all is what I remember. We had been in the blind since dawn on a mild, uneventful, clear December day. With an approaching cold front from the north-

**Above:** Well placed decoys are an important tool in duck hunting. **Right:** For many hunters, the work of a well trained retriever raises the level of satisfaction of the overall experience.



©Dwight Dyke



west, the river basin came alive with waterfowl, creating an excitement and fervor in the middle of an otherwise nondescript afternoon. When we left the river that evening, we had ducks in our bag, but what I remember most was that nature, with all its glory and magnificence, treated us to a display of raw power that I had not anticipated.

Often, the memorable moments of hunting come when being totally enveloped by all that the outdoors has to offer. These times may arrive with a sudden storm or the appearance of an unexpected animal or bird. The experiences are often fleeting and certainly not scripted. It's magic when they happen. These special moments help define the reasons why I hunt.

Probably the most satisfying aspect of the pursuit of waterfowl comes from the serendipity of not knowing what the morning may bring. The day is often measured by what I saw or experienced, not by how many birds fell.

Sometimes the highlight of the day comes before first light. During one cold November morning duck hunt, I arrived in the early darkness to a marsh full of honking Canada geese. It was also the morning of the annual Leonid meteor shower. I stood on the shore looking into the starlit sky, and watched a rain of shooting stars fall from the sky with a cacophony of geese celebrating the coming dawn.

On opening morning of one October duck season, I set my decoys on a small creek that feeds a large marsh on the Pamunkey River. From my blind I heard a noise behind me and to my right. Suddenly, a loud bark-like sound arose from the water. Four river otters were coming down the creek. On this particular morning, blocking their path were about a dozen duck decoys. It was obvious that the lead otter was surprised to see the decoys in its path. It let out a loud sound that, if translated, might have been, "What in the world is that?"

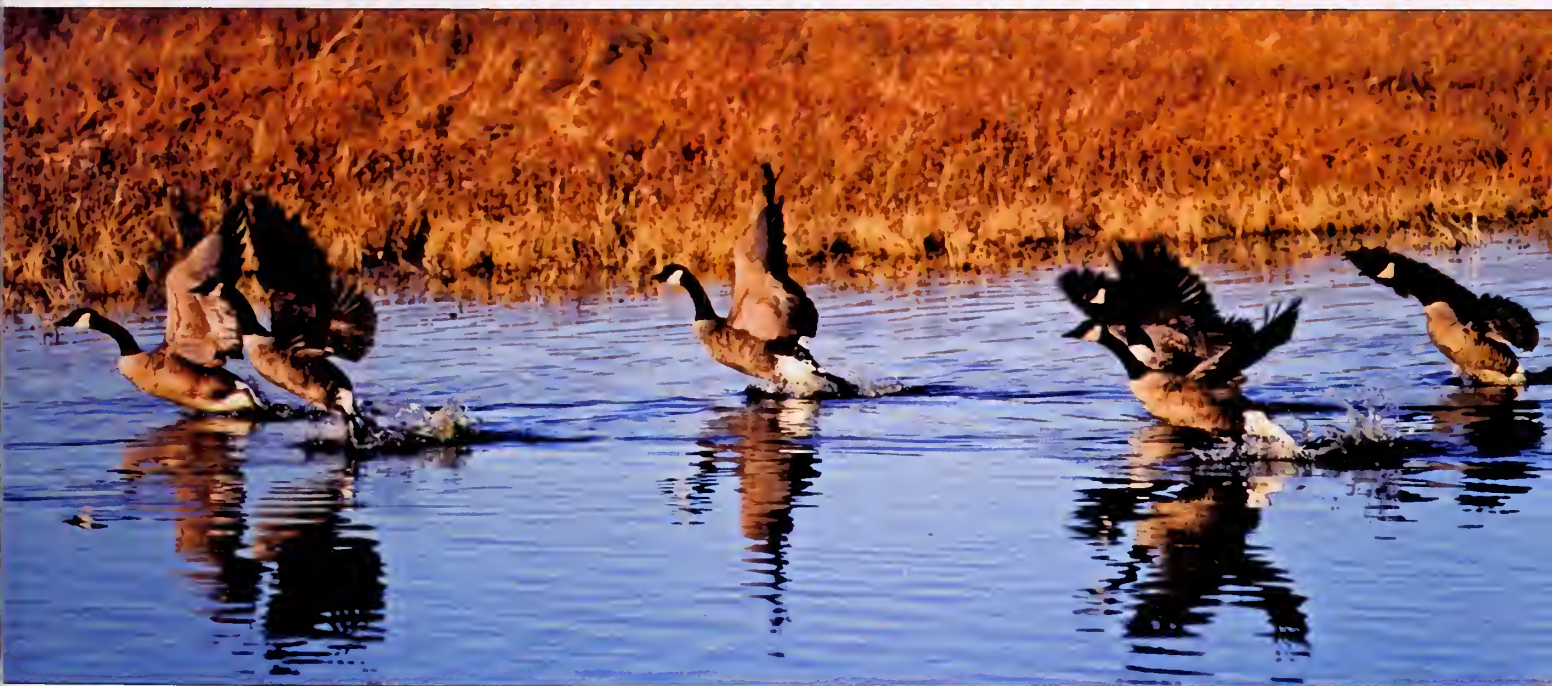


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*To be successful, the waterfowl hunter needs to be well hidden and always ready for the arrival of ducks or geese.*

**Below:** *The Canada goose population has increased in Virginia, providing greater opportunities for the hunter to see and perhaps bag a goose.*

# an The Harvest



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©Gregory J. Pels

Virginia's wetlands are home to a variety of wildlife, such as this family of otters—a rare treat to encounter. **Right:** Mallards are the most predominant duck species found in Virginia. The calling of one to a spread of decoys takes a lot of practice and a little bit of luck.

After much chatter, the otters retreated back upstream, poking their heads above the water. They peered at the bobbing decoys and pondered what their next move should be. Gathering courage, the lead otter again swam to the decoys with the others right behind. They stopped once more at the decoys, and retreated up the creek from where they had come. On the third try, the four were apparently brave enough to swim through the decoys and continue downstream to the marsh.

Late one waterfowl season on a very cold morning, the Mattaponi River was covered in ice. There were not many ducks flying over the decoys that morning, but a red fox held our attention when it came out of the woods and carefully worked its way upriver toward our blind. We watched the fox for the longest time as it looked for something to eat on this cold January day. It finally wandered back into the woods, having as much luck with its hunt as we were having with ours.



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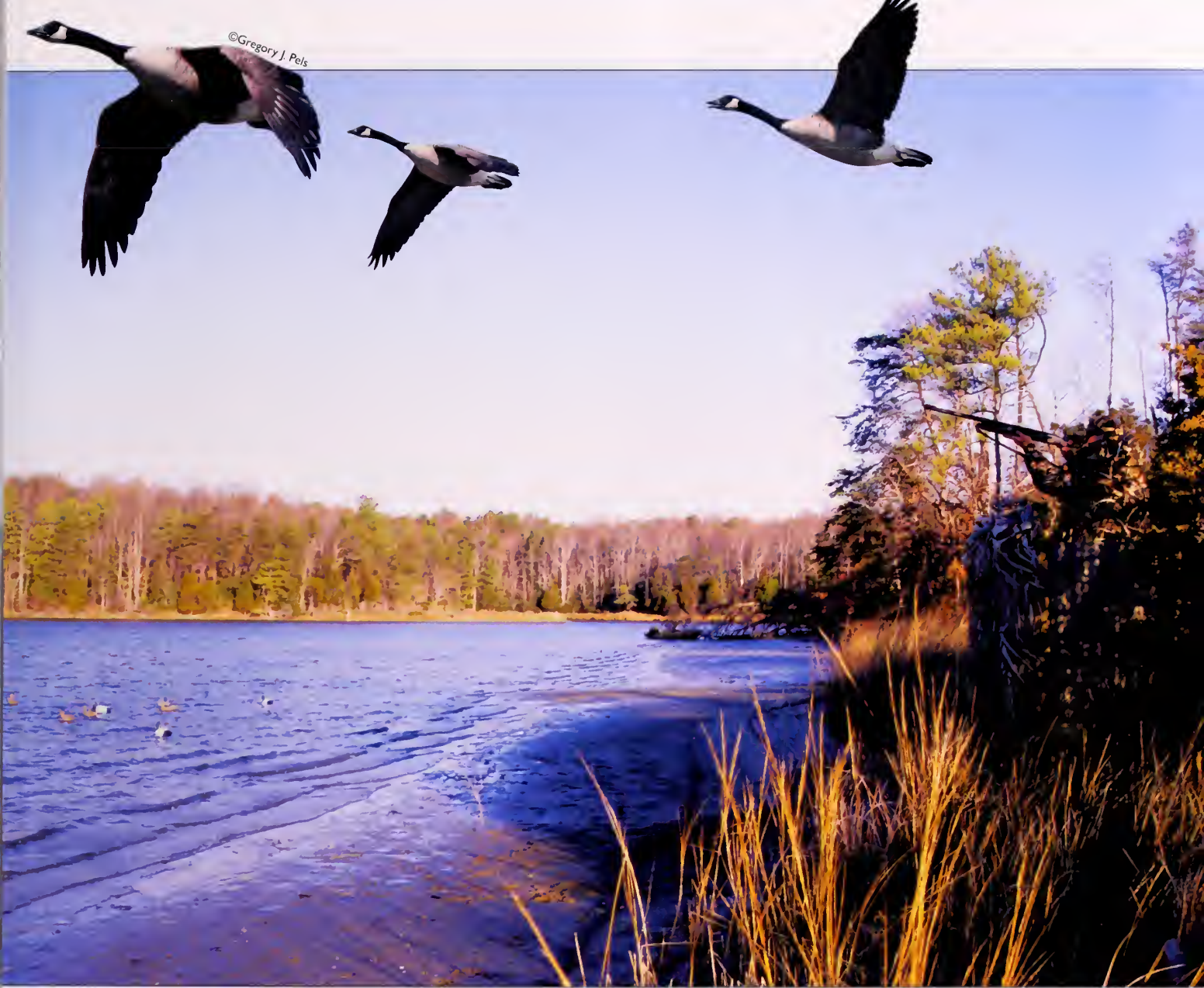
©Randall Shank

thick green marsh but when we could not locate it, we gave up. Then, my dog started digging as hard as she could under my feet. She grabbed a very much alive wood duck out of the mud where it had buried itself. This is my only memory of that hunt.

Recently while hunting from a blind on a spit of land that juts out into the Chesapeake Bay, we arrived in the early morning darkness by boat on calm seas. Once we got set up in the blind the weather began to change. To the northwest I saw

*A cold winter day on the Chesapeake Bay can make the waterfowl hunter feel wonderfully alive.*





©Gregory J. Pels

*A cold front from the north will often bring waterfowl within range of the hunter willing to brave the elements.*

©Randall Shank

clouds thicken and move in our direction. The wind picked up and shifted out of the north. At the same time, groups of Canada geese appeared from far out in the bay, headed to the western shore for shelter. For the next couple of hours the wind grew stronger and geese and ducks made their way to the shelter of the marsh. For just a few hours it was us, the raging wind, white-capped waters, and waterfowl everywhere. As the waves built in intensity, we realized that for safety reasons we had to leave and get back to the boat landing. But our spirits wanted to stay.

I sometimes ask myself why I

hunt waterfowl on these cold winter mornings when the alarm clock wakes me from a deep sleep. It is always satisfying to call in a flock of ducks and have an accurate shot bring one down. On some days, though, the ducks aren't flying or shots don't ring true. The measure of success is more than the number of birds in the bag.

Satisfaction comes from spending a morning when the cold winds from Canada make you feel wonderfully alive. For the duck hunter, it can be the feel of the wind in your face or the stark beauty of a cold sunrise in winter's light. It might be the sight of

a deer swimming across the river or a beaver slapping its tail indignantly at your presence. Or, it can be the companionship of a retrieving dog watching a distant flock of ducks high in the sky.

The answer to the question changes with each day in the field. Never knowing what the day will bring is why I go back again and again. □

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*Randall Shank is a freelance writer who lives on the Mattaponi River in King & Queen County. He is currently training a Boykin spaniel puppy in preparation for her first hunting season.*



# Passing It On

A new apprentice license gives beginners one more reason to hunt.



*It's up to parents, relatives, and friends to continue the hunting tradition. When you see the smile on a kid's face when getting the first deer, you'll realize it is worth any sacrifices you might have to make.*



photos and story  
by David Hart

One of the most memorable deer of Jay Stoltzfus' life didn't carry a giant set of antlers on its head and it didn't fall from some miracle shot. In fact, Stoltzfus didn't even pull the trigger on the little five-pointer. His nephew did. It was the boy's first deer ever and Stoltzfus, a builder from Prince

Edward County, was sitting next to him at the time.

"He had never hunted before. His father used to hunt but he gave it up quite a few years ago so when my nephew started asking my sister about it, she asked me if I would take him," he recalls. "I didn't hesitate to say yes."

That was seven years ago and his nephew eventually turned into a skilled hunter who spends plenty of time in the woods on his own now. For the first few seasons, however, Stoltzfus and his nephew, who was 12 when he got that five-pointer, sat side-by-side, scanning the autumn woods for any sign of a passing whitetail. He carried a rifle of his own, but Stoltzfus never expected to actually shoot. Instead, he gladly gave every opportunity to his young partner. Now Stoltzfus takes his own children hunting and just as he did with his nephew back then, he gladly gives his boys the first shot.

"I get more enjoyment out of my boys having success than when I have a successful day myself," he says.

These days, Virginia's hunting tradition has plenty of competition. Parents like Stoltzfus are having a hard time squeezing in a few hours in a deer stand with their children. Weekend sports, after-school activities and the general bustle of everyday life can get in the way of free time that might otherwise be spent in the woods. Thanks to Virginia's new apprentice hunting license, finding a little extra time just got easier. In the past, anyone over the age of 12 who wanted to hunt had to first take an eight-hour hunter safety course. For many potential hunters, that was just one more hurdle to overcome. The apprentice license, however, removes that obstacle by allowing new hunters to go afield under the close watch of an adult mentor for up to two years. It not only gives beginners





*Not sure where to start? Try dove or squirrel hunting. There's usually plenty of action and children can participate by looking for game and helping retrieve it.*

**Left:** *Teaching a young boy or girl to shoot is a great way to spend time with your child, as well as pass on the hunting and shooting tradition.*



an opportunity to test the waters, so to speak, it gives parents, friends and family members the opportunity to do exactly what Jay Stoltzfus did: take someone hunting without requiring them to first pass a safety course.

## Not Just For Kids

The apprentice license may be geared toward young hunters, but anyone who wants to enjoy the thrill of the autumn woods can participate. Paul Cupka took a 58-year-old woman on her first-ever deer hunt last year. She had some waterfowl hunting experience, but despite a string of promises by others to get her into the woods on a deer hunt, it never happened until she met Cupka, a general contractor from Louisiana.

"I took her during muzzleloader season and she got a spike within the

## Need A Mentor? Just Ask

As a group, hunters are giving people. They willingly donate venison to food banks and they work on conservation projects that benefit a variety of wildlife. They are also more than happy to share their love of the outdoors with anyone who wants to give it a try. Odds are, everyone knows a hunter, or at least they know someone who knows a hunter. Want to check it out? Just ask.

Still not sure? Many state chapters of national conservation organizations like the National Wild Turkey Federation, Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl and Quality Deer Management Association hold youth or beginner hunts. Check out their Web sites to find a chapter near you.





*There's more to taking a beginner hunting than just hunting. Teach them everything you know and you'll pass along valuable lessons. You may just discover a favorite new hunting partner.*

## Just How Safe Is Hunting?

Safety issues rank high among the concerns of potential new hunters. Believe it or not, hunting is one of the safest sports, ranking lower in injury rates than even golf and recreational walking. According to a report by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, participants in both running and soccer are eight times more likely to sustain an injury than while hunting, and hunting is far safer than football, basketball and hockey. Another study found that, as a group, youth hunters accompanied by an adult have an excellent safety record. Concerned? No need. Hunting is extremely safe and beginners who follow the instructions of their mentor have nothing to worry about.

first hour of the hunt," he recalls. "She still talks about it every time I see her."

He also takes boys and girls deer, duck, dove and goose hunting, and he accompanies wounded Iraq war veterans into the woods. He helps organize group hunts for returning soldiers. Some have previous hunting experience; many have none. It's Cupka's way of giving back to those who gave so much themselves, but he admits his motives are somewhat selfish.

"I get such a thrill out of seeing a new hunter have success. The look on their face when they get their first deer or goose or whatever is just awesome. Even if they don't get anything, just to share the experience and to teach them something is as good as getting a deer myself. I actually enjoy watching others hunt as much as I enjoy hunting myself," he says.

## Take the Plunge

Hunting isn't the easiest sport to jump into, agree Stoltzfus and Cupka. It's a learned skill, one that can take years to master. That learning curve, however, is greatly reduced through the help of an adult mentor, someone who already knows why a buck makes a scrape or why squirrels stay in their dens on a blustery afternoon. A parent or an adult partner with experience can help answer all the questions a beginner might have, like: What equipment do I need?

Not much, says Cupka. Truth is, you don't need to max out your credit card to gear up for your first hunting trip. You'll need some basic equipment, some warm clothes, and a gun or bow, but you don't need to run out and spend a week's paycheck.





*Watching a young boy or girl grow into an accomplished hunter is as rewarding as having a successful day in the field yourself.*



*Mentoring a beginning hunter doesn't end when the season ends. Continue the education all year long; they will be better hunters and so will you.*

The simplest solution is to borrow some equipment before you make a financial commitment. What dedicated hunter doesn't have a safe brimming with guns, an extra set of camouflage and any other gear you might need? Most would be willing to share their gear with a responsible beginning hunter. Cupka loans guns to first-timers because he understands the start-up costs can be overwhelming, and Stoltzfus started his kids with guns he already owned.

"You don't have to outfit a beginner with the latest and greatest gear. Hand-me-downs will work just fine. The main thing is to make sure they are comfortable and they sit still," he says.

## Keep It Fun

But even if a fidgety 10-year-old can't sit still, that's okay. Stoltzfus suggests letting a kid be a kid. When

he started taking Tyler when he was too young to actually carry his own gun, Stoltzfus made sure he kept each outing relatively short and he always packed plenty of snacks to keep Tyler occupied. An afternoon hunt was as much a picnic as an actual hunting trip, but what mattered most was that Tyler enjoyed the event.

"I never expected to actually get a deer when Tyler was young, but that didn't matter. What I was concerned about was making sure we had fun together, even if we were just going for a walk," he says.

Those walks, however, always incorporated some sort of lesson that could be used on future hunting trips. Stoltzfus would point out buck rubs, scrapes and other sign and he would explain how that sign related to deer behavior. Cupka also uses his time with beginning hunters to teach them some basic knowledge of game and non-game wildlife. The more any hunter knows about nature, the better their odds of success.

He also stresses the importance of making the event fun, even if that means sacrificing any realistic chance of success. He gladly lets his young guests honk on their goose call or blow on a buck grunt call or dig through the inevitable bag of snacks that always accompanies him in the field. If each outing is a positive one, those beginners will eventually spend more time focused on the ultimate goal of hunting—bringing home some game for the table. Until then, Cupka isn't concerned about success.

"If they're having fun, I'm having fun," he says.

Cupka is only 31 and his first child is just 2. He could be spending his free time in a tree stand by himself or hanging out with other guys with the same skill level and enthusiasm for hunting as he has. Instead, he gladly sacrifices his own hunting time to share his knowledge with others, not because it's the right thing to do, but because it's just plain fun. □

*David Hart is a full-time freelance writer and photographer from Rice. He is a regular contributor to numerous national hunting and fishing magazines.*





# Lake Prince's Trifecta

*Three fish.  
Three state records.  
One lake.*

story and photos by  
by Marc N. McGlade

**T**here must be something in the water. How else could it be explained? Lake Prince is home to three state-record fish. It's ridiculous, frankly. Some bodies of water are just simply, well, special. That describes this Coastal Plain beauty.

In this continuing series, we

share the three state records from Suffolk's Lake Prince: white perch, carp, and longnose gar. Some of the best lakes in Virginia are located near downtown Suffolk and are dubbed the Suffolk lakes. Cotton, peanut, and soybean fields surround this quaint town in Southside. The Suffolk lakes are positioned just west of Virginia's Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

The Suffolk lakes are made up of a series of interconnected water bodies, including Western Branch Reservoir, Lake Prince, Burnt Mills Reservoir, Speights Run, Lake Cohoon (sometimes spelled Cahoon), Lake Meade, Lake Kilby, and the Lone Star Lakes (a series of 12 lakes, some inter-

connected and varying in size from three to 50 acres, totaling 490 acres).

Lake Cohoon, Lake Meade, Lake Kilby, and Speights Run are water supply reservoirs owned by the city of Portsmouth, but located in Suffolk. The city of Norfolk owns Burnt Mills Reservoir, Lake Prince, and Western Branch Reservoir.

## The Skinny on Lake Prince's Fat Fish

Lake Prince is the second largest of the Suffolk lakes, at 777 acres. Two major swamps (Ennis and Carbell) feed Lake Prince. The upper portions of these swamps are dense cypress forests.





**Left:** Suffolk's Lake Prince is a scenic lake in Virginia's Coastal Plain that lays claim to three current state-record fish. **Top:** Stephen Miklandric of Chesterfield is a gar expert who frequents the Suffolk lakes. He is trying to break the state record and believes another monster gar lurks in Suffolk. **Above:** Lake Prince's dam is a tiered structure that separates the lake from Western Branch Reservoir.

The three state-record residents from Lake Prince are quite impressive. A giant white perch (*Morone americana*) weighing 2 pounds, 8 ounces is Virginia's all-time champion "stiffback." A 49-pound, 4-ounce bruiser of a common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) also hails from the 777-acre fishing spot. Lastly, Lake Prince coughed up a 25-pound, 2-ounce longnose gar (*Lepisosteus osseus*).

Chad Boyce is a fisheries biologist from the district office of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) in Chesapeake who manages the fish factory. He prefaces

his comments by saying he doesn't believe Lake Prince has "magic water" that has resulted in these state-record fish.

"Rather," he says, "it probably has a lot to do with the fact that gar and white perch are native to the drainage, and targeted by a select angler group." Similarly, carp have been in the Nansemond drainage since the late 1880s and are now considered a naturalized species here.

*Lake Prince largemouth expert Bobby Kinsey battles a trophy largemouth from the Suffolk fish factory.*

Whatever the reason or reasons, it's incredible.

White perch weighing 1 pound and 4 ounces, or measuring 13 inches in length, qualify for a trophy fish certificate from the DGIF; 20 pounds or 34 inches for carp; and 10 pounds or 40 inches for longnose gar.

Boyce speculates that, most likely, the state-record fish caught in Lake Prince were able to grow to such sizes because they are all either native fish or introduced long ago and already established species in the western branch of the Nansemond River drainage—the river that was impounded to form Prince in the 1920s.

"All three species (white perch, carp and gar) are common fishes in the tidewater area, especially in the fresh-to-brackish upper reaches of the rivers and creeks," he explains.

"Once the lake was impounded, these local fishes (and others) established themselves and obviously have done quite well. Gizzard shad and many other prey species are abundant in the lake and provide great forage for the gar and white perch."

Boyce says carp in this lake do not seem to be overly abundant, but biologists do see some large individuals. The carp likely feed upon macrophytes (aquatic plants), algae,







*Red wigglers paired with a sinker will fool some feisty redears from Lake Prince.*

He says they have also encountered some large carp in their sampling efforts, but it is likely that the lack of attention to these “lowly” fish is the real reason the record has not been broken.

“Many fishermen may not even be aware that state records exist for gar and carp,” Boyce contends, “and it’s possible that record fish have been caught and released by fishermen that simply did not want to deal with a large gar or carp in their boat.”

“We captured a white perch in Prince in 2006 that weighed over 2 pounds when striped bass sampling with gill nets and it was released

alive. A new state-record white perch could be swimming in the lake today.”

According to the biologist, white perch garner a lot of seasonal attention from local anglers, but the primary draw is the great largemouth bass and sunfish opportunities, as well as other game fish such as striped bass, chain pickerel, and crappie.

“Prince is renowned as being a mid-summer destination for anglers seeking a citation sunfish,” the biologist says, “but summer is also a great time to target the big, longnose gar that are often seen basking near the surface. Many anglers shy away from these inland ‘leviathans,’ but a 15- to 20-pound gar on light tackle is no joke.”

and benthic (bottom-dwelling) invertebrates.

## Prince Is No Pauper

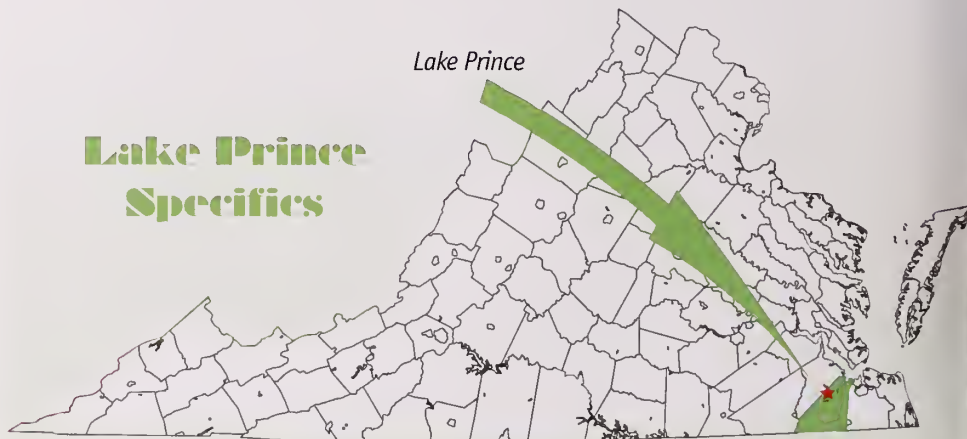
Besides the state-record species, Lake Prince affords anglers the chance at numerous other fish species. Perceptive bass anglers have long known about its chunky largemouths.

“Prince is perhaps the best largemouth bass lake in southeastern Virginia, with numerous citations caught each year,” Boyce adds. “Sunfish such as bluegill, redear (shell-cracker), and redbreast sunfish are abundant and can grow quite large. White perch, black crappie, chain pickerel, and striped bass are frequently targeted by anglers as well.”

Boyce says the Department has captured near state-record weight longnose gar during their striped bass gill net sampling, and they have lost a few monster gar and carp that were able to escape the nets as they were hoisting them.

“I would not be surprised at all to see another state-record gar come from Prince,” he says. “Carp are not as abundant in Prince as they are in Western Branch but tend to be bigger.” (Lake Prince flows into Western Branch, and the lakes are separated only by a dam.)

## Lake Prince Specifics



- For fisheries information and regulations regarding Lake Prince, contact the DGIF district office in Chesapeake at (757) 465-6812. For even more information, visit online at [www.HuntFishVA.com](http://www.HuntFishVA.com).
- Lake Prince’s boat ramp is located on Route 604 (Lake Prince Road), off Route 460 at Providence Church. Bank fishing is restricted to a small area around the ramp. Lake Prince is open from sunrise to sunset, all year. Gas motors as powerful as 9.9 horsepower are allowed. The city of Norfolk has amended their codes to allow boats with outboard motors larger than 9.9 horsepower to access the lake if the gas tank is removed or the outboard is disabled (by removing the propeller).
- Anglers must have a daily or annual city of Norfolk boat permit (in addition to a Virginia freshwater fishing license) to launch private boats. These can be purchased through a mail-in form by visiting [www.norfolk.gov/utilities/resources/](http://www.norfolk.gov/utilities/resources/) or locally at Dashiell’s Showroom and Owens Self Service in Suffolk.
- The city of Norfolk’s Web site ([www.norfolk.gov/utilities/resources/](http://www.norfolk.gov/utilities/resources/)) includes lake maps in Adobe Acrobat Reader format.





*Small boat anglers will do fine at Suffolk's Lake Prince. Gas motors as powerful as 9.9 horsepower are allowed.*

**Below:** *Massive white perch roam Lake Prince. The state record weighed 2 pounds, 8 ounces, which is a giant specimen.*



## Come See for Yourself

Suffolk is sandwiched between Virginia's incredible saltwater fishing to the east and Lake Gaston and Buggs Island Lake to the west. Oddly enough, the Suffolk lakes can be overlooked, despite their top-heavy rankings when it comes to the Old Dominion's trophy fish certificates. Yes, there indeed is something in the water at Lake Prince: many species of fish—big fish—and lots of them! □

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*Marc N. McGlade is a writer and photographer from Midlothian. As a self-proclaimed angling addict, Marc travels across Virginia fishing for a variety of species.*





# Retaining a Geography of *Hope*

*How Conservation  
Easements Preserve  
Virginia's Family  
Farms and Wildlife  
Habitat.*

by William H. Funk

Virginia has seen explosive growth in the last several decades. While the rate of population influx from other states and countries has been enormous, the acreage of land being transformed into suburbs, shopping centers, golf courses and freeways has been significantly higher. Today landowners in even the most rural areas of the Commonwealth, previously spared the unsupportable increases in property values that accompany aggressive land speculation, are experiencing unprecedented pressure to develop their open spaces, family farms and working forests.

Hundreds of thousands of retiring baby-boomers can use the Internet to virtually access even the most remote Appalachian hollows to hunt for real estate, and the traditional inhabitants of these areas are finding it difficult to refuse their offers. Landowners desiring to keep their property intact are faced with a series of financial complications that, without proper guidance, may make passing land down to their children

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financially impossible, eventually forcing them to sell it off for development.

An accelerating factor in the ongoing loss of open space and farmland is the fact that individual titleholders to private interests in land are growing older, with a median age of 55-65 years. A nationwide turnover in title over the next several decades will be the inevitable result of the economic and demographic situation we currently face and will affect millions of acres of open space. Now is the time for Virginians to take proactive steps to save the land they love.

## What is a Conservation Easement?

Voluntary restrictions on land use that pass with the title in perpetuity, conservation easements are the most popular and successful means of preserving family land. Essentially, conservation easement donors permanently relinquish the right to intensively develop their property; the donation is made to an easement "holder," typically a non-profit land trust like The Nature Conservancy or a state body like the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Department of Forestry, or the Department of Game & Inland Fisheries. These donations lessen the land's market value, which is based on its "highest and best use"—such as commercially developable real estate—by limiting its development potential in favor of protecting specified conservation values.

Landowners who donate conservation easements as charitable gifts for public benefit can generally claim both federal income tax deductions and state income tax credits. Title and all other rights in the property—rights to sell, gift, and bequeath—remain with the landowner, as does the right to use the land in any way that doesn't harm its recognized conservation values.

Attributes that pose attractive opportunities for easements include farms, forests, wildlife habitat, historic areas such as battlefields, property of particularly scenic beauty enjoyed by the public, outdoor recreation areas, and property contribut-

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## Additional Resources

◆ Governor Kaine's 400,000-acre land conservation initiative and statewide database, managed by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. Virginia is well on its way toward that conservation goal!

Go to:

[http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/land\\_conservation/index.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/land_conservation/index.shtml)

◆ To find a land trust in your area, go to: [http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/land\\_conservation/wheretogo.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/land_conservation/wheretogo.shtml)

◆ For information on conservation easements, the tax credit program, and the DVD shown here, "Your Land Legacy:

An Introduction to Conservation Easements in Virginia," contact Conservation Partners, LLC, at (540) 464-1899, P.O. Box 152, Lexington, VA 24450, or visit: [www.conservation-partnersllc.com](http://www.conservation-partnersllc.com).



- ◆ Estate & Gift Tax Benefits: The donation of a qualifying conservation easement will not have gift tax consequences and will remove the value attributable to the easement from the donor's estate for estate tax purposes. An additional exclusion of up to 40% of the value of the land under easement from estate tax may be available as well.
- ◆ Federal Charitable Income Tax Deduction: Generally equal to the value of the easement (see below), the deduction can be used to reduce the donor's "adjusted gross income" by up to 50% per year (or 100% for taxpayers making 50% or more of their income from farming or forestry during the year of donation) for sixteen years or until the easement value is used up.
- ◆ Virginia Land Preservation Income Tax Credit: The state tax credit can be used to offset the donor's Virginia income tax liability dollar-for-dollar, and any unused credit can be transferred by gift or sale to other Virginia taxpayers. This ability to sell the credit for cash makes it particularly attractive to easement donors who do not have significant Virginia income tax liability.

## How Conservation Easements Work

Here is an example illustrating the benefits an easement donor might realize from the Virginia land preservation tax credit. Dave and Debbie Jones have a 500-acre farm valued at \$2,000,000 near rapidly growing Winchester. The Joneses raise hay, beans, and beef cattle, and their farm also includes a considerable acreage of hardwood forest which is selectively logged and is home to bear, deer, turkey, migrating songbirds and other wildlife. An avid fly-fisherman, Dave Jones fences his cattle from the trout stream that flows through the farm. The farm is visible from two state roads and offers a pleasant view to motorists. The Joneses have been approached several times by real estate speculators eager to subdivide their property, but hoping to keep the farm in the family they have rebuffed all offers. Aside from the land itself they have little else in the way of real assets.

The Jones property has significant conservation values: farm and forestland, wildlife habitat, water resources, and scenic assets. Working with a conservation advisory organization, the couple chooses to preserve their family farm through a conservation easement which allows for the future construction of a guest

ing to a riparian buffer zone along a stream, creek or river. Riparian easements are particularly suitable for stringing together intact pieces of forested habitat by providing vegetated wildlife corridors for such far-ranging species as the white-tailed deer and the wild turkey. The larger and more intact a property is, and the nearer it is to encroaching development, the more likely it will have higher conservation value, though acreage alone will not necessarily be a determinant.

Recognizing that easement donation and the protection of open spaces is in the public interest, the federal and state governments offer a number of tax incentives to landowners seeking to preserve their land from development:



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# Tax Advantages

## Virginia Land Preservation Tax Credits

\$1,000,000 = land value pre-easement  
\$ 600,000 = land value post-easement  
\$ 400,000 = easement value (EV)  
\$ 160,000 = state income tax credit (40% of EV)

Credit is good for the year of donation and the 10 following years.  
Maximum credit use is \$100,000/year/taxpayer (seller or buyer);  
very high-income married couples may be able to use \$200,000/year.  
Some or all of the credit may be sold for cash to other Virginia taxpayers.

## Federal Income Tax Deduction

Easement Value (EV) deductible from Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)  
@ 50%/year for year of donation and 15 following years.  
Donor's EV is \$400,000.

### Donor makes \$100,000 in 2008

\$50,000 is deductible from donor's AGI in 2008 (50% of AGI).  
\$350,000 of the EV is left for deduction.

### Donor makes \$100,000 in 2009

\$50,000 is deductible from donor's AGI in 2009 (50% of AGI).  
\$300,000 of EV is left for deduction.

### Donor makes \$200,000 in 2010

\$100,000 is deductible from donor's AGI in 2010 (50% of AGI).  
\$200,000 of EV is left for deduction.

### Donor makes \$450,000 in 2011

Only \$200,000 is deductible from donor's AGI in 2011 as he has  
reached his EV total.

cottage near their house, the expansion of their current home, and the construction of two more houses and cottages or garage apartments elsewhere on the property. The easement, which is consistent with the county's comprehensive plan, allows for the division of the property into as many as three parcels but precludes most commercial uses other than farming and forestry. Hunting, fishing, hiking, riding and other traditional outdoor uses will continue unabated.

The Joneses' appraiser estimates that the easement will reduce the value of their land from \$2,000,000 before the donation to \$1,200,000 afterwards; thus, the "value" of their easement is the difference, or \$800,000. Assuming that their easement and appraisal were drafted by knowledgeable professionals and qualify under applicable law, the Jones family will be entitled to a transferable land preservation tax credit equal to 40% of their easement value of \$800,000, or \$320,000. Most easement donors use some of their credit to pay their state income taxes and sell the rest through professional mediators.

## Myths About Conservation Easements

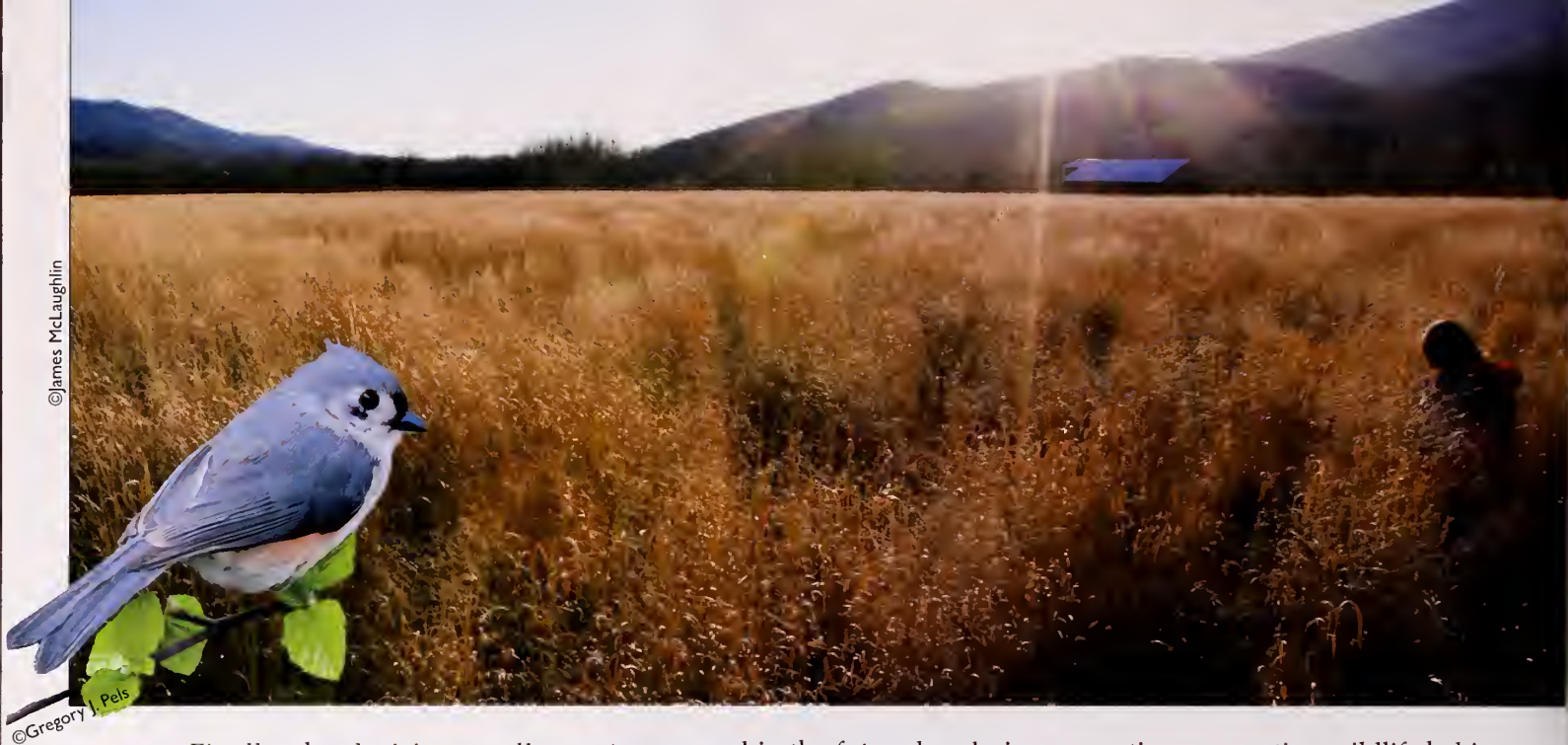
There are several myths about conservation easements that deserve to be dispelled. The first falsehood is that by donating an easement the landowner is somehow "locking up" his land for future uses. In fact, the only land-use right being given up is a right that people who love their land don't want anyway: the right to destroy what is special about it.

Another myth is that easement donation means that the government will be taking over the land. The job of the easement holder, whether it's a government agency or a land trust, is to ensure that the terms of the deed of easement protecting the property's conservation values are honored

over the long term, usually through an annual site visit. As we've seen, title to the property under easement remains with the landowner.

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Finally, the decision to allow public access to property being placed under easements resides entirely with the landowner. There is no requirement for public access in the great majority of easements.

### The Last Best Chance to Preserve Virginia's Quality of Life

Conservation easements allow landowners to pick and choose what uses will be allowed on their proper-

ty now and in the future by placing restrictions on undesirable practices. Easements are flexible agreements that specifically tailor land uses according to each donor's individual preferences. Working foresters might want to retain the right to selectively log stands of timber on their property while being amenable to restrictions on future building. Farm owners desiring to continue farming or grazing may give up similar development rights and may derive further benefits by pledging to follow agricultural

practices supporting wildlife habitat and clean water. Hunting clubs will want to maintain food plots and forested tracts to maximize wildlife diversity. The terms of a conservation easement's final appearance are negotiable as long as the property's identified conservation values are protected in perpetuity.

Conservation easements are the most advantageous means for private landowners to retain ownership of their property while making certain that it remains protected for their



Lee Walker

### Portrait of an Easement Donor

Jim Wilson owns two forested properties in Franklin and Floyd counties. An ex-trustee of the Western Virginia Land Trust, former Director of the American Chestnut Foundation, and an "amateur

forester at heart," Jim remembers the region when it was still undiscovered. "What I thought would never be changed has now been broken up into 5 or 10-acre lots," he says. "I was hunting in an area I'd walked over all my life when I came across all these clear-cuts and new home sites." Jim clearly saw that the changing landscape of his childhood was in urgent need of protection. Jim and his Brittany spaniels are avid grouse hunters, and he had long dreamed of "owning land where I wouldn't have to ask anyone's permission to hunt, hike, or enjoy the aesthetics of nature."

Toward that end he purchased two parcels of forestland, one of 300 acres and another of 900, and placed conservation easements on them in 2002 and 2007 with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation as holder. Aside from a cabin and

some cleared areas for food plots, Jim has done little to alter his property other than to selectively cut timber in furtherance of a wildlife management plan. Today Jim and his children and grandchildren enjoy a magnificent hunting preserve whose preservation contributes to scenic views from the Blue Ridge Parkway and helps to maintain a healthy population of brook trout in Rennet Bag Creek, which flows through the property.

I asked Jim about his motivation for donating conservation easements on his property; his reply was a heartfelt testimony to why hunters want to preserve their land. "I felt like crying when I saw habitat being destroyed for subdivisions," he said, "and I didn't want the same fate to happen to the other woodlands in the vicinity. Now I know it will be here forever."



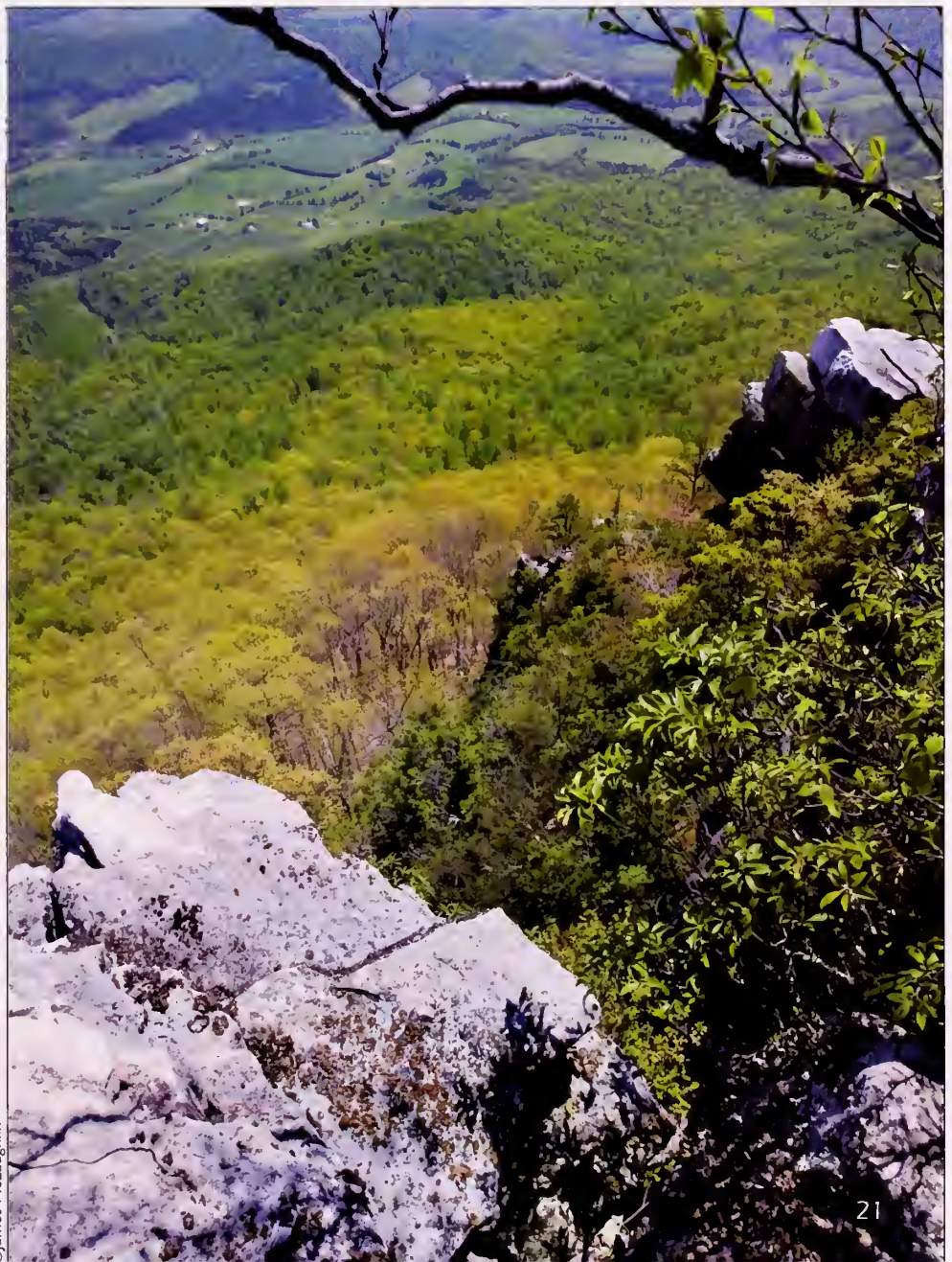


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descendants for decades and even centuries to come. The rolling farmlands, forested mountains, coldwater streams and coastal wetlands that make Virginia what it is are being lost to us at a shocking rate. Each year America's birthplace becomes a little more like those other parts of the country we'd like to avoid...destroying one locale we move on to the next, stay for a time, then blunder off to the next unspoiled countryside, leaving in our wake another metastasizing sprawl of asphalt and concrete, neon and brushed aluminum that soon becomes merely another place to escape from.

We are abundantly fortunate in Virginia to have the most generous tax incentive program in the country—a recognition on the part of our elected officials that our wildlife and rural heritage have meaning and dignity. Donors of conservation easements not only honor themselves and their families with their generosity; by preserving signature examples of the natural splendor we have inherited, they provide all Virginians with at least a vestige of the wide world that was once all around us. □

*William H. Funk is an easement specialist with Conservation Partners, LLC, a freelance conservation writer, and a member of the Virginia State Bar. Mr. Funk has previously written about wildlife and wilderness issues for Virginia Wildlife.*



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Virginia  
Naturally  
*Seeing is*

*A Loudoun County  
School Embraces  
Place-Based Education*

photos and story by Gail Brown

**B**lue Ridge Middle School (BRMS) administrator Marlene Jefferson arrives early at the overlook on the days the 6th graders experience the Appalachian Trail (AT). Locating herself by the rocky outcropping, a short distance from the Bear's Den Hostel, she waits to greet her students and witness their reaction as they step to the edge of the precipice, lift their eyes, and take in the valley and mountains that stretch out below. "It takes their breath away," states Jefferson.

*"The whole point is to impress them with nature. When you hear them gasp in wonderment, you know you've reached your goal."*

There are goals to be reached back on campus as well. Science is king at BRMS, and little wonder, as daily field experiences are possible in their outdoor classroom—an area which includes a pond, fields, woods, turtles and lizards, lots of bugs, and endless opportunities to interact with nature. There, on a regular basis, students can conduct scientific research, sketch and create works of art, write in journals, or just sit and enjoy being part of the natural world.

On Wednesday, the best day of the week at BRMS, students partici-

*Hikers learn that white blazes mark the Appalachian Trail; blue blazes mark side trails.*



# Believing

pate in any one of over 60 clubs, several of which are dedicated to environmental studies. The Wolf Club, the Landscaping Club, the Bird Watching Club, and the Save Our Snakes Club allow students to build connections with the wild things they find so appealing. Connections are also forged with peers and adults who share similar interests in the natural resources of their community.

The Save Our Snakes Club, led by science teacher Dave Snyder, has become one of the most popular clubs at school. "This club got its start because one student came to me and asked how to find snakes. Our students always seem to want to learn more, and I like sharing my interest in snakes, so forming the club was a natural progression. I wanted to teach the kids safety procedures and how to identify non-poisonous from poisonous snakes," says Snyder.

"I didn't want them to turn over a rock and get bitten. The thing I can say with confidence is that the kids who have been in the snake club have more confidence in their ability to identify different species of snakes...and what to watch out for in regards to poisonous snakes and safety practices." This, of course, is not only helpful to his students but reduces the number of snakes needlessly killed.

Then there's science class, where the brave as well as the wary enter cautiously, each knowing they will share their space with an equally skeptical and curious snake. Here, both students and snakes show a proclivity toward making friends. According to Snyder, "The first thing the kids do when entering the classroom is check out the snakes. They are excited to have them there." What students learn is both helpful and interesting.



*Views from the Appalachian Trail can change how you see other things.*



*Above and below: The school's outdoor classroom includes a pond and wooded area for study.*







*Students take a break, but “leave no trace.”*

Helpful tips include the fact that the snakes they see in the water are not water moccasins as many people surmise. The two venomous snakes to watch out for in their community are copperheads and timber rattlers. Yet, all snakes bite, so the fact that students learn to treat these reptiles with the respect they deserve keeps both students and reptiles safe.

The kids also enjoy learning about the characteristics of different snakes. When one student saw a hog-nosed snake, everyone learned this particular snake can act like a cobra. And, not unlike a student who “lost” his assignment, the hog-nose snake has contingency plans: It plays dead in an effort to get out of tight situations. But now (because everyone knows better), when queried about their homework, Snyder’s kids can’t get away with their favorite: “The snake ate it!”

The focus on appreciating and protecting natural resources at BRMS began in 2007 after several staff members received training (and then trained their peers) in the philosophy of *A Trail to Every Classroom*. The staff



*The Bird Watching Club is one of over 60 clubs at Blue Ridge Middle School.*

came together to stand behind the shared goal of promoting “place-based” education—a process that focuses on environmental stewardship, civic responsibility, and local history as the foundation on which to build knowledge in all subject areas.

And what better place for students to connect with the history and beauty of their community than on the famed Appalachian Trail? Revered for its beauty, respected for its formidable challenges, and renowned for its place in our nation’s



history, the AT provides numerous opportunities to meet and conquer both physical and mental challenges. During field work, students learn “leave no trace” practices, evaluate the water quality of a mountain stream, study trail maintenance and safety strategies (when lost, hug a tree!), and sketch what their senses tell them is important.

On some days all planned activities stop if long-distance hikers (“thru-hikers”) are willing to take the time to share their adventures at impromptu gatherings. Questions such as: “How can you hike so far and so long?” and “What made you decide to go off on such an adventure?” top the list of things kids want to know. Although the kids hike approximately 2 of the over 2,000-mile-long trail, they can relate to the challenges and rewards offered by longer journeys. They see their hike to the stream to monitor the water as their own challenges faced and conquered. Speaking of their trek Amanda says, “It was a tiring hike, but I did it!”

The benefits of learning about life on the trail don’t stop at the overlook but are carried home to share with family members. Teacher Inez Lemmert shared that, after a trip to the AT, one of her “quieter” students went home and said that she wanted to become a thru-hiker. This brought “a new realization between parent and child, bringing both closer to nature as well as closer to each other.”

Following his trip another student said, “I have to bring my dad here!” A short time later, father and son enjoyed a day and night of hiking and camping on the AT.

Have these activities changed the students, their behaviors, and their relationships with the natural world and their community? Marlene Jefferson believes these experiences provide opportunities for students to mature. “Experiences on the trail help students evaluate what they believe will be important when they are out on their own.”

But sometimes change is less dramatic. Camouflaged by busy schedules and holidays, it arrives unnoticed, yet is powerful nonetheless,



*No matter the direction, adventure awaits you on the Appalachian Trail.*



*The Snake Club was formed because one student asked a question.*

like teacher Dave Snyder’s wry observation: “By the end of the year few students, if any, claim seats close to the door.” □

*Gail Brown is a retired principal for Chesterfield County Public Schools. She is a lifelong learner and educator, and her teaching and administrative experiences in grades K-12 have taught her that project-based environmental programs teach science standards, promote core values, and provide exciting educational experiences for the entire community.*



# Be Wild! Live Wild! Go

## PUDDLE



Mallard

story and illustrations  
by Spike Knuth

**P**uddle, or dabbling, ducks are so-called because they feed mainly at the surface of shallower, generally smaller, or marshy water bodies. Frequently they feed off the bottom by tipping on their heads to reach it. With tails up, they "tipple" or "dabble" with their feet to maintain balance. They are capable of diving on occasion but not very deep or for long periods of time. They have larger, wider wings and simply fly by pushing themselves into the air with a down-sweep of their wings, giving the impression they are jumping out of the water. Puddle ducks are mainly vegetarians, feeding on roots, stems, leaves and seeds of aquatic and terrestrial plants and grains, as well as insects, small mussels, crustaceans, leeches,

and fish. Their legs are located in the middle of their bodies, enabling them to walk fairly easily on dry surfaces, with bodies held almost parallel to the ground when they stand. Puddle ducks are colorful, especially the males. Females reveal mostly basic grays, browns, tans, whites, and buffs, with V-shaped patterns, streaks, and spots. Both sexes have colored speculums. They tend to fly in smaller groups than their diving cousins. Most puddle ducks nest in

grasses usually close to (but sometimes away from) marshes or ponds. The wood duck is an exception.

### Mallard

(*Anas platyrhynchos*)

The hardy, adaptable mallard is the best known of all ducks. It domesticates easily, and is probably the original stock of most domestic breeds. Commonly called "green-head," the drake is recognized by this shiny green feature. The hen is capable of emitting the popular "quack," while the male's voice is a softer, higher pitched "cray." Wild mallards nest over most of the U.S. and Canada, with a preference for prairie pot-holes. They normally nest in reeds or grass near water. Truly wild mallards depend on more specialized habitat, while expanding populations of semi-wild mallards are seen in parks and are apt to build anywhere.

### American Black Duck

(*Anas rubripes*)

The black duck is unique to the eastern half of the United States. Both sexes are similar in color. A dark, chocolate brown body appears almost black, with a lighter, buffy-



American Black Duck



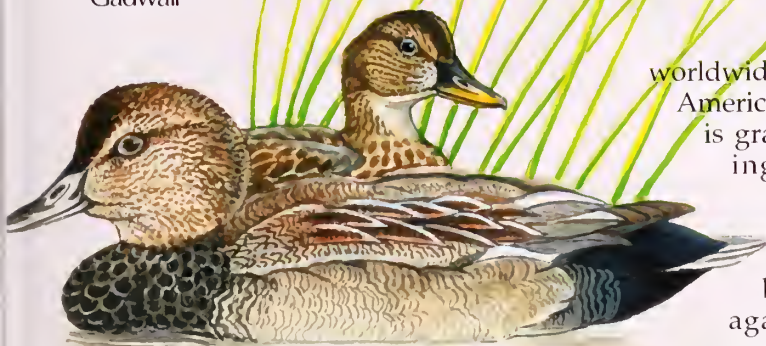
# How Wild!

## DUCKS

brown head and neck, and silvery white and gray underwings. Their speculums are a deep, purplish-blue.

Black ducks nest mainly in eastern Canada and along the northeastern U.S. coast, but as far west as Manitoba. One thing different about this duck is that it commonly nests in forests, near lakes or rivers. A very hardy duck, it winters from the Great Lakes and New England south; mainly in the mid-Atlantic. Black ducks feed on aquatic plants and seeds—adding clams and snails to their diets in coastal habitats. Due to loss of habitat, especially encroachment into historically coastal habitats, and interbreeding with mal-

Gadwall



lards, black duck numbers have been down below the long-term average.

### Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)

In recent decades gadwalls have become a common wintering duck in Virginia marshes. The gadwall is found in all continental flyways and

worldwide, except in South America and Australia. It is gray, often appearing dark. A good field mark on the water is its well defined black rear-end against an overall gray appearance. The speculum of the gadwall is

black, gray and white. Above that is a chestnut red shoulder patch. The female is similar, but paler. In North America gadwalls breed primarily in the prairies of Canada and the north central states, although they have established a breeding population in the Atlantic Flyway. Adult gadwalls tend to be more vegetarian than other ducks; about 90 percent of their diet consists of aquatic vegetation. Gad-

Northern Pintail



walls seldom gather in large flocks. They usually move in small groups of up to a dozen birds and will occasionally travel with widgeons.

### Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

The pintail regularly winters in small populations along the Atlantic Flyway from New Jersey south to Florida. Males are easily recognized on the water by their long, slim white neck, long tail, and a grayish body with a dark brown head. The females are basically brown but also have the long slender neck and a shorter, but pointed, tail. In flight the pintail's wings are decidedly pointed, with the male's long, white neck and breast very distinctive. Pintails are early spring migrants and nesters, arriving in the north central states and Canada where they seek out nesting sites in prairie potholes during late March and early April. They nest in





American Widgeon

grasslands, sometimes a mile from water. Pintails travel all major flyways to winter in coastal areas or inland marshes south of the frost line.

### American Widgeon (*Anas americana*)

The widgeon is a medium-sized duck, easily identifiable by its white wing patches, white patch on the top of its head, white belly, and dark pointed tail. Its grayish cheeks are separated from its white "pate" by a mask of blackish-green. The females have a grayish head, spotted like the male but with only a dark eye area and no patch. Their flight style has been likened to a flock of pigeons, as they fly in compact groups moving quickly and erratically, twisting and turning on their sides. Their call is a series of soft, peeping whistles not unlike a brood of chicks. They have a

feeding habit of waiting for coots or diving ducks to surface with a morsel of aquatic vegetation, to quickly grab it away.

### Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*)

Blue-winged teal are among the earliest fall migrants—flocking up as early as late August, and moving

Blue-winged Teal



south by September to Central and South America. They are great travelers. One teal, banded in Minnesota, flew to Peru in one month—a distance of 4,000 miles! The blue-winged teal is one of our smallest ducks, measuring about 16 inches in length.

In spring the drake has the dark purplish-gray head with the distinctive large, white crescent marks in front of its eyes. At this time its upper parts are dark, with a pink-cinnamon

breast marked with round black spots and a white flank. Both sexes have chalky blue forewings with glossy green and black speculums. The wings are a good field mark in September, because the drakes resemble hens at this time. They are just coming through molt and are in their eclipse plumage. Blue-winged teal regain their breeding colors in late November or early December.

### Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*)

The green-winged teal is the smallest of our puddle ducks—only about 15 inches in length. The duck flies in tight, wheeling formations, twisting and turning with great precision. The male doesn't show any distinguishing field marks in flight from a distance; it just looks dark! However, if the sunlight hits it right,

he'll show a chestnut-colored head with a dark, glossy-green mask, as well as glossy green and black speculum. The male looks just like the female early in fall as it goes through its eclipse plumage. The green-winged teal breeds across the continent, from the northernmost states north to the Arctic tree line. It is the symbol of Ducks Unlimited's youth program, "The Greenwings."

### Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)

The shoveler is a small duck with a short-necked, pointed wing appearance. During spring, the drake's dark green head, chestnut-red belly



Green-winged Teal





Northern Shoveler

and sides, and white chest are very distinctive. Both sexes have light blue shoulder patches with black and green speculums, similar to the blue-winged teal. They sit low on the water, with bill pointing downward as if too heavy to hold up. They fly erratically—somewhat like teal—often making sudden downward movements. Even in flight they seem to carry their bill in a downward slant.

By far, the most outstanding feature of the shoveler is its large, spoon-like bill; it is often called “spoonbill.” The shoveler’s bill has very pronounced, comb-like teeth, called lamellae, along the edges of its upper and lower mandibles. These lamellae are specially designed for feeding on bottom debris of shallow waters or on the surface, with the purpose of straining out food particles.

## Wood Duck

(*Aix sponsa*)

The wood duck drake is a beautiful creature, showing a crested head of iridescent green and purple with thin white lines and a white forked throat patch. Its lower neck and breast are rich purple-chestnut, marked with white. Its sides are yellow-gray marked with fine, black, wavy lines, and its breast and sides are separated by a large black crescent-shaped mark preceded by a white one. The female is beautiful in her own right. She is basically gray to

gray-brown, with white markings on her sides and a white tear-shaped eye ring. The wood duck has many local names, including: “acorn duck” because of its favorite food; “summer duck” because it often nests in the same range that it winters in; “squealer” due to its unusual call; and “swamp duck” due to the type of habitat it favors. “Tree duck” and its common name “wood duck” are appropriate names as well, since it is always associated with trees and woodlands. The woodie is native to North America. Its range covers primarily the deciduous forests of the eastern half of the United States, mainly in the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways. Wood ducks favor brushy-edged or wooded freshwater ponds, lakes, and streams, hardwood bottoms of oak and gum-cypress swamps, and other mast producing woods. Tree cavities are preferred nesting sites, especially old woodpecker holes, although it has taken readily to manmade nesting boxes. Once hatched, the young must jump out of their high-rise home, bouncing unhurt off the ground like little balls of cot-

ton. In fall, juveniles and adults wander about in small groups, seldom associating with other species. They feed mainly on acorns and other nuts, but also a variety of plant seeds and wild fruits. Wood ducks are adept at threading their way through the trees, swiftly and surely. Their call is an almost piercing, unduck-like squeal of “hoo-eeek, hoo-eeek.” □

*Spike Knuth is an avid naturalist and wildlife artist. For over 30 years his artwork and writing have appeared in Virginia Wildlife. Spike is also a member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association.*

**Be Wild! Live Wild! Grow Wild!** is a regular feature that highlights Virginia's Wildlife Action Plan, which is designed to unite natural resources agencies, sportsmen and women, conservationists and citizens in a common vision for the conservation of the Commonwealth's wildlife and habitats in which they live. To learn more or to become involved with this new program visit: [bewildvirginia.org](http://bewildvirginia.org).



Wood Duck





## 2008 Outdoor Calendar of Events

Unless otherwise noted, for current information and registration on workshops go to the "Upcoming Events" page on the Department's Web site at [www.HuntFishVA.com](http://www.HuntFishVA.com) or call 804-367-7800.

**November 1:** Shenandoah Valley Audubon Birding Festival, War Memorial Building in Winchester. Free, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

**November 15:** Firearms deer season opens.

**December 6:** Educational Rabbit Hunting Workshop, Kennedy's Orchard, Bedford County. 8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

**December 6:** Women's Pheasant Hunting Workshop, Remington. For more information contact Sharon Townley at 540-439-2683 or email [shadygrovekennel@aol.com](mailto:shadygrovekennel@aol.com). □

## Christmas Bird Count

The world's longest-running bird survey, the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) census, dates back to Christmas Day 1900. During the Christmas 2000 count, 1,412 volunteers participated in Virginia and over 50,000 participated across the Americas. Each "count circle" has a 15-mile diameter (about 177 square miles). Volunteers count all birds that they see within their assigned portion of the count circle on one designated count day. The entire circle is counted on one day, which always falls between December 14 and January 5. Some volunteers begin early in the morning, sometimes just after midnight, to count owls, which can be difficult to find and count during daylight hours. Typically, at least ten volunteers count a circle, but the number of counters can reach the hundreds.

Here in Virginia, about 42 circles typically are surveyed, although not all circles are counted every year. They cover most regions of the state, but are fewest in the Piedmont. Volunteer turnout is especially strong in Northern Virginia and in Shenandoah National Park.

CBC data are used by researchers for many purposes: to study bird population numbers and distribution across time; to compare with other data sets to determine the effectiveness of different survey types; and to investigate communities of different species, such as winter bird diversity in different areas, or during different weather conditions. The data collected by volunteers every year are invaluable. The information contributes to the longest-running and most geographically-broad data set in ornithology, which allows researchers to monitor population trends and distribution over long time periods and across vast distances.

If you'd like to participate in one of Virginia's Christmas Bird Counts, go to the Audubon CBC Web site at <http://www.audubon.org/Bird/cbc/> and get involved! □



by Beth Hester

*Preparing Fish and Wild Game*  
Edited by Don Oster, David Maas, Jill Anderson et al.  
2000 Creative Publishing International  
ISBN: 0-86573-125-X  
Hardcover with color photographs  
[www.creativepub.com](http://www.creativepub.com)

*"Today, more and more people choose to include wild game in their diet. For those*

*who enjoy spending a day on the water or in the field, bringing home a meal of fresh fish or game is a welcome bonus. And when given the opportunity, those who don't fish or hunt also like to share in the bounty of the wild harvest. Compared to domestic meat, wild game is lower in fat and calories, and richer in flavor."*

—The Editors

The first nip of crisp autumn air signals the advent of the holiday season. Friends and family gather to renew relationships, share good times, and enjoy traditional foods. Fresh fish and game are a distinct treat at any time of the year, but in many circles, celebrating the wild harvest is an integral part of any holiday feast.

This season, try a few new dishes, courtesy of Creative Publishing, where the editors have thoughtfully assembled one of the most comprehensive fish and game cookbooks available. An abundance of simple and sumptuous recipes grace the pages of this handsome volume which includes: Pecan Turkey with Maple Sauce, Apple-Ginger Ruffed Grouse, Rum-Spiced Venison Chops, Grill-Smoked Duck, Perch-Bacon Bundles, Island-Style Salmon, and Trout Party Dip.

Yet, *Preparing Fish and Wild Game* is a step above your average cookbook; it's a user-friendly guide covering all aspects of fish and game preparation. New hunters and anglers can learn the best ways to fillet, trim, or butterfly a fish, properly portion game birds, prepare a rabbit, make sausage, or field dress a deer by following the clear, step-by-step instructions. From proper game care to cooking and storing the harvest, color photos accompany each technique. You can even learn how to pickle fish!

Especially gratifying is the fact



that the illustrated dressing and cooking techniques make it easy to use every viable part of the animal so that fur or feathers can later be used at the fly tying bench.

Whether your tool of choice is a well-seasoned cast iron skillet, roasting pan, smoker, or wok, there are recipes that will appeal to those lucky enough to enjoy the hospitality of your table this year, and for many years to come. □

## Outdoor Kids



*Congratulations to Trae Jones of Glen Allen, shown here with a buck he took in Varina during the first day of black powder season last year. According to Trae, generous landowner Cory Attack gave up his deer stand to the young hunter that particular day.*

*He continues, "After sitting for a while I passed up three does; then took my trophy buck. I've learned already that being patient pays off." Trae enjoyed the excitement shared by his hunting partners, especially his granddad, Robert Melton, who had the deer mounted.*

*"This was the happiest moment of my life. There were a lot of tears of joy over this hunt," says Trae.*

## DEER HUNTERS:

### Don't Forget Hunters for the Hungry

A friendly reminder about the critical role you play in keeping the Hunters for the Hungry program alive and well.

Last year, this organization provided nearly 363,500 pounds of venison to Virginia families in need. That amounts to 1.4 million four-ounce servings of nutritious, low-fat meat going to communities across the Commonwealth.

Offers of assistance and donations can be made by calling 1-800-352-4868, or by emailing [hunt4hungry@cs.com](mailto:hunt4hungry@cs.com).

## Virginia Wildlife Photo Contest Reminder



The deadline for submitting photographs for the 2008 Virginia Wildlife Photography Contest is November 3, 2008. Winning photographs will appear in the special March 2009 issue of Virginia Wildlife magazine. For more information, visit the Department's Web site at: <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/events/photo-contest.pdf>.

**Buy Your Lifetime License**  
**1-804-367-1076**

**Report Wildlife Violations**  
**1-800-237-5712**



*Find Game* is an interactive Web-based map viewer designed by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to provide better and more current information about hunting land location and access in Virginia. *Find Game* allows users to map hunting areas by location and/or by game species, along with hunting quality by species, land manager contact information, site description, facilities available, access information and associated Web links. To learn more about *Find Game* visit [www.HuntFishVA.com/hunting/findgame](http://www.HuntFishVA.com/hunting/findgame).

## Attention Cooks

### Grab Your Measuring Spoons!

*The ever-popular recipe column that ran in this magazine for many, many years will be re-introduced with the January 2009 issue.*



*"I like to leave the treestand up for a few days to let the deer get used to it."*



# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE CALENDAR



It's once again time to purchase a new Virginia Wildlife calendar. For more than 20 years the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has been publishing one of the most visually stunning and informative wildlife calendars in the country.

The 2009 edition of the Virginia Wildlife calendar highlights many of the most sought after game and fish species in the state. Virginia hunters, anglers, and wildlife enthusiasts will appreciate the rich colors and composition of the 12 monthly photo spreads.

The calendar is full of useful tidbits for the outdoors lover—including wildlife behavior, preferred fishing and hunting times, hunting seasons, state fish records, and much more! Life history information is provided for each species featured.

Virginia Wildlife calendars make great holiday gifts and are still being offered at the bargain price of only \$10 each.

Quantities are limited, so order yours now! Make your check payable to "Treasurer of Virginia" and send to: Virginia Wildlife Calendar, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104. To pay by VISA or MasterCard, you can order the calendar online at: [www.HuntFishVA.com](http://www.HuntFishVA.com) on our secure site. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery.



Jeff Trollinger

*Representatives from state & local agencies along with local and federal political representatives cut the ribbon to officially open the Willis Wharf Platform.*

## New Wildlife Viewing Platform Dedicated

By Stephen Living

On Virginia's Eastern Shore, a three-year project was successfully concluded with the dedication of the Willis Wharf Wildlife Viewing Platform on September 19th. The project began in 2005 with a grant from the Department of Environmental Quality's Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Program to enhance the opportunities for tourists and residents to appreciate the natural beauty of Willis Wharf. The agency's Watchable Wildlife Program managed the overall project, but from inception

to completion, a variety of partners brought unique insight and skills to the table.

Willis Wharf is an unincorporated village on the seaside of Northampton County. Economic activity here centers around the abundant shellfish found in the relatively pristine waters of Parting Creek. The creek supports a number of watermen as well as commercial aquaculturists, and the village is a designated stop along the "Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail" as well as the "Seaside Water Trail."

Willis Wharf provides outstanding opportunities to see coastal wildlife. The same waters that nourish the fisheries and aquaculture operations attract huge numbers of birds during the spectacular fall migration. In fact, year round a number of species frequent the marshes and mudflats visible from the banks of the creek. Bald eagles, royal terns, marbled godwits and whimbrels can all be seen hunting and foraging here.

Those interested in taking in the wildlife could do so before the platform was built, but the rocky berm that fronts the creek didn't provide firm footing for extended study. The goal of this project was to provide a fully accessible, safe location to facilitate wildlife-based recreation. Toward this end, project partners convened in 2005 to plan the building of a structure that would—most importantly—integrate

well the existing working waterfront with the needs of the residents and wildlife watchers at Willis Wharf. Plans were then designed by DGIF Capital Program staff.

Our appreciation is extended to CZM, who provided grant funds as well as organization and logistical expertise, and to all project partners: Accomac-Northampton Planning District Commission, Northampton County, the community of Willis Wharf, and Eastern Shore Homecrafters—who went above and beyond the work plan with extra touches to create a beautiful structure. □



Ken Conger



# A Duck Hunter's Journal

by Tee Clarkson

November 17th, 2007

**T**raditions have a way of ending if you don't give them the care and attention they deserve, and certainly opening day is as much about tradition as it is about killing ducks. We were all guilty: me, my father and my brothers, in allowing several years to pass without sharing the same blind on the first morning of duck season.

The weeks leading up to November 17th were torturous. I constantly found myself looking to the sky for signs of migrating birds. One evening in early November I spotted about fifty mallards heading south over I-64 toward the Richmond skyline as I was driving to eat dinner at my in-laws' house. That sight only spurred more upward gazing.

Finally, the morning arrived. I woke from a fitful night of half-sleep to the smell of coffee brewing in the kitchen of our hunting club. My father was the only one up. We sat and drank and talked about the prospects of the day. Soon, my brothers awoke and we were all decked in waders; you could taste the excitement in the air.

Tossing out the first decoy of the season doesn't differ from tossing out the last one of the previous season but in the thinking on it. One speaks to the days that have been and another to the ones to come, and for a man who makes a habit of waiting out the dark hours before dawn in swamps and tidal marshes, hoping for the sound of screaming wings at first light, both are equally important.

This morning we had a friend along with his black lab, which made me think of Jack. Two seasons have passed since he died. I can still picture him shaking with adrenaline, sitting on the same log that is now bare, literally looking like he couldn't handle one more second without a bird to pick up. I hope those images remain with me for as long as I am around, or at least as long as I am able to make it out to the swamps before daylight.

At shooting time the wood ducks came in droves, and we fired and fired and fired. Mostly missing, but connecting enough so that we had a ten bird limit between the five of us in fifteen minutes. Normally the black ducks are here at the beginning of the season, but not this year. We took one gadwall on top of our limit of woodies, and by 8:30 we were eating venison sausage and eggs wrapped in corn tortillas and telling stories over another pot of coffee.

This is a wonderful time of year.





# Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

## Celebrate the Season With Holiday Light Photography!

When I think about the holidays, I think about getting together with family and friends, hot chocolate, snow (skiing), and those cheerful, colorful lights decorating everything from office buildings to trees, houses, topiaries, and even boats! Some of the best times I've ever had photographing non-wildlife subjects were those that involved getting out on a cold winter night and photographing festive light displays.

Hmmmm, you might say. Colored lights are fun to photograph? Well, yes, if you shoot them like I'm going to suggest. There are some physical and psychological requirements for this though. You will need to be able to dance and jump around and swirl your arms in the air in public without being embarrassed. Are you game? Well then, let's get started!

First, you need to locate a fabulous holiday light display. My favorite place in Richmond is Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens and their awesome annual exhibition of holiday lights, which usually begins in late November. Check your local area for similar offerings.

Next, I grab my digital camera, a bunch of memory cards, a small flashlight, and extra camera batteries. You could bring a tripod if you really wanted to, but I prefer the "free hand" approach for this exercise.

Travel to your selected location and find a light display that really captures your eye. Make sure your flash is turned off. Set your camera to manual (automatic will work too) and your ISO to 100 or 200. Try not to use an ISO any higher than 400 because you might run into "noise" problems, which could take away from the final results. Get close to the lights and get an exposure reading to start with. I normally set my camera on manual, ISO 100, f11.0 at 10 seconds. The longer the exposure, the more fun you can have.



*"Using my Canon EOS 5D digital camera, a 35mm focal length lens, and settings of ISO of 100, f.11.0 at 10 seconds, I was able to capture this colorful scene of holiday lights at Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens in Richmond. I made the exposure by standing very still for several seconds to hold the background lights and then moved my arms up and down at the end of the exposure." © Lynda Richardson*

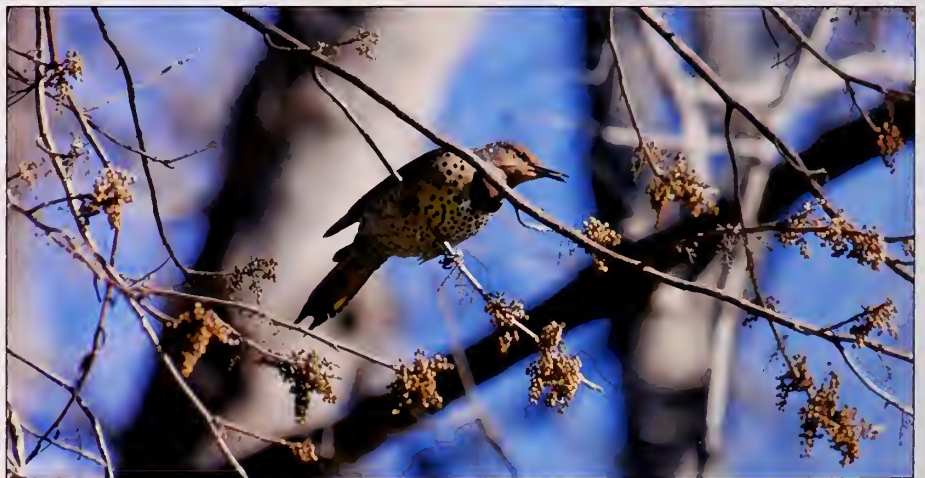
Now, point your camera at the lights, focus, and release the shutter and dance! Swirl your arms around. Make zig-zag patterns in the air

while still pointing at your subject. Shake your booty! The long exposure will capture your movements, and the resulting images will be awesome abstract blurs of color! This is probably the only type of photography where I laugh out loud the whole time I'm shooting.

Let yourself go! Experiment with different body movements, colors, and patterns. If anyone asks, just tell them you spilled your hot chocolate. Now go have fun! □

You are invited to submit one to five of your best photographs to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send original slides, super high-quality prints, or high-res 360 dpi jpeg files on disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where you captured the image and what camera and settings you used, along with your phone number. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work with the readers of *Virginia Wildlife*!

## Image of the Month



*Congratulations to Reece Lukei, Jr. of Virginia Beach for his delightful image of a northern flicker eating poison ivy berries. Reece reports that when the berries are at their peak, the birds know it—feasting on them for two weeks. If you've ever wondered how poison ivy gets spread through your yard, Reece also reports that, after the birds feed on the berries, the tiny seeds are discharged as the birds perch around the yard. Reece captured this shot with a Nikon D200 digital SLR camera, using a 80-400mm zoom lens at 400mm.*



# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE OUTDOOR CATALOG



2008  
Limited Edition  
*Virginia Wildlife*  
Collector's Knife

Our 2008 Collector's knife has once again been customized by Buck Knives. The knife features a red-tailed hawk engraving, augmented by a natural woodgrain handle and gold lettering. A distinctive, solid cherry box features birds of prey.

Item # VW-408

\$90.00 each (plus \$7.25 S&H)

2007 *Virginia Wildlife*  
Collector's Knife



Customized by Buck Knives, this classic model 110 folding knife is 8 1/2" long when fully opened and has a distinctive, natural woodgrain handle with gold lettering. Each knife is individually serial numbered and has a mirror polished blade engraved with a fox. A solid cherry box engraved with foxes is included.

Item # VW-407

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Plush  
Collectibles



From mountains to the coast, our plush collectibles will remind you of your favorite Virginia habitat. (Sizes range from 5" to 9" long)

Item #VW-519

White-tailed Fawn

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Item #VW-518

Sea Turtle Set (2)

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Hooks & Horns

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Match wits against the king of upland game birds, the spring gobbler, and test your hunting skills with the magnificent white-tailed deer.

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\$14.95 each

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Please allow 3 to 4 weeks for delivery.

## Take a friend. MAKE A HUNTER



## VIRGINIA APPRENTICE HUNTING LICENSE

The new apprentice hunting license serves as a first-time Virginia resident or nonresident hunting license and is good for 2 years.

The license holder must be accompanied and directly supervised by a mentor over 18 who has on his or her person a valid Virginia hunting license.

The apprentice license does not qualify the holder to purchase a regular hunting license, nor exempt the holder from compliance with Department regulations. A hunter education course must be successfully completed to obtain a regular hunting license.

A bear, deer, turkey license and all applicable stamps or permits are required in addition to the apprentice license.

Previous Virginia resident and nonresident hunting license holders may not use an apprentice license.

To learn more about the Virginia Apprentice Hunting License, call (866) 721-6911 or log on to [www.HuntFishVA.com](http://www.HuntFishVA.com).



# This Holiday Season

Give The Gift That Will Be Enjoyed

**ALL YEAR LONG**



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